

TED POE
2ND DISTRICT, TEXAS

COMMITTEES:
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
FOUNDER OF CONGRESSIONAL
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4302

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1605 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE: (202) 225-6565
FAX: (202) 225-5547

DISTRICT OFFICES:

HUMBLE
20202 U.S. HIGHWAY 59 NORTH
SUITE 105
HUMBLE, TX 77338
PHONE: (281) 446-0242
FAX: (281) 446-0252

BEAUMONT
505 ORLEANS
SUITE 100
BEAUMONT, TX 77701
PHONE: (409) 212-1997
FAX: (409) 212-8711

February 12, 2008

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

I want to invite you to come to Texas and view the Port of Beaumont and petrochemical facilities along the Sabine Neches Waterway to get a first hand view of how your agency's recent announcement of funding and guidelines for the Department's Port Security Grant Program (PSGP) severely threatens the maritime and port security in this vital area of Southeast Texas.

The Port of Beaumont in my Congressional district was recently downgraded by your Department from a Tier I port to a Tier II port, a decision that could reduce eligibility for grant funding by more than half. I have talked to representatives of the Port who are very concerned about the impact this decision would have on the safety and security operations on the Sabine Neches Waterway, which connects the Port of Beaumont to the Gulf of Mexico.

While I understand the risk methodology used to award these grants are being based on a more selective process, I am disappointed your Department has failed to take into account the importance this Waterway has on both the military and economic needs of the nation when coming up with your criteria. The Port of Beaumont is the 4th largest port in terms of total tonnage. **It is the top commercial military port in the nation, sending valuable resources to our troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.** The Waterway is the most used in the nation by crude tankers and petrochemical plants located along the Waterway produce 11 percent of the nation's refined petroleum products and nearly 22 percent of the nation's jet fuel. The Waterway supports 7 refineries, 2 strategic petroleum reserves, and 2 Liquefied Natural Gas facilities. Efforts to expand this production, such as Motiva's planned expansion to become the nation's largest refinery, advances the need for continued and additional levels of security funding, not less.

Should this downgrade be allowed to happen and should these grants be reduced, it takes away vital resources to protect the maritime industries in this region. Should an attack on this infrastructure occur, the economic consequences to the nation's supply and price of energy would be enormous and it would threaten our ability to send our military needed resources. The 9/11 Commission repeatedly states that terrorists continually seek to exploit our vulnerabilities.

This reduction in status and subsequent reduction in grants, Mr. Secretary, is most certainly a vulnerability.

Again, I would hope you will accept my invitation and visit this vital area first-hand in the hopes that you will reassess this decision and allow this region the needed port security funding to continue providing for the needs of this nation.

God and Texas,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, featuring a large, stylized 'A' followed by a series of vertical, wavy lines, and ending with a horizontal flourish.

TED POE
Member of Congress
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